

Newsletter

Berengrave LNR, where history & nature come together



Issue 30 Jun 2014

Next Member's Meeting

The next meeting will be our **AGM** and will commence at 7.00 pm on Friday 6th June, 2014 (doors open 6.45 pm) at the Methodist Church Hall, in Wakeley Road, Rainham.

The programme will be –

1. AGM business
2. A talk, '**In the beginning...**' As part of our continuing programme of talks at our members' meetings, one of our ex- Chairman, Brian Baker, will give a (fairly) light hearted talk on the history of Berengrave LNR
3. As usual refreshments will be available after the talk and will provide an opportunity to meet and chat with your fellow members. Remember, guests are very welcome (guest's entry fee is £2).

Future Member's meetings

All will commence at 7.00pm (doors open 6.45pm) at the Methodist Church Hall, in Wakeley Road, Rainham.

Tuesday 2nd September

Friday 5th December (Possibly a Christmas Party)

The AGM and your Committee

Your Committee currently consists of:

- Chairman - Terry Clare
- Vice Chairman - Jack Hughes
- Secretary - Pat Clare
- Treasurer - Eddy Newport
- Rep for Berengrave Estate - Simon Marshall
- Rep for Berengrave Lane - Liz Arnold
- Rep for Lower Rainham Road & Motney Hill Road - Di Weedon
- Rep for Macklands Estate - Di Weedon
- Website Manager & Newsletter Editor (Non-exec member) - Brian Baker
- Historian (Non-exec member) - Fraser Miller

The Chairman and Treasurer have both stated their intention of standing down at the AGM. Currently we do not have a volunteer for the Chairman's post. It is imperative that, if FoB is to continue, we need a volunteer for Chairman.



Please do not assume that someone else will volunteer, or that the present incumbent will, again, agree to extend his tenure. Without new blood, the Friends of Berengrave will cease to exist at the AGM

Please, take one step forward and volunteer.

Notes of Committee Meeting 6th May 2014.

The Committee discussed the Reserve and the effect of the very wet winter on the trees and plants. Concerns were expressed about the stability of the chalk face when it dries out. Nothing can be done in the Reserve until it dries out but then urgent work will be needed. Any members visiting are asked to report anything unusual or dangerous.

Strimmer & Blower for loan

FoB owns a strimmer and a blower, both petrol driven and with all necessary safety equipment. These were bought when the Council agreed we could help with maintenance in the reserve, but before the Council changed their minds! Fob members may borrow this equipment, free of charge, but they supply the petrol and it is entirely at their own risk. Contact the Chairman or Secretary for further information. (01634 233748)

Flooding of the Reserve



3 March 2014. Flooding at its deepest.
Concrete blocks can just be seen below the water

Although water levels have dropped considerably, at the time of writing the Reserve is still flooded. What isn't flooded is extremely muddy. Boardwalks, timbers of which have been submerged for many weeks, should be considered suspect until a full Health & Safety check has been carried out by the council. Many trees have been brought down as their root systems have been weakened by the saturated ground. Many others are in a potentially dangerous condition. In short – please take all possible care and report anything which you consider dangerous. Reports should be made to FoB's Chairman or Secretary (01634 233748) and the Council (01634 337432)



29 May 2014.
Approximately 2 feet (600mm) of blocks exposed.
Railings around washmills can be seen.
Approximately 2 feet (600mm) of water remains.

Pictures by Fraser Miller

Members' meeting. 2nd September 2014.

A speaker, Alison Ruyter from the Kent Wildlife Trust, has been booked for this meeting. Her title is 'Medway & Mid-Kent Downs Area Warden' and the title of her talk will be 'The Medway Smile Living Land.' (I don't understand the title but that is what she wrote). Usual start time and refreshments as usual.

Pat Clare, Secretary, FoB

Reserve Monitoring (April 2014)

Went for a walk today alongside the Chalk pit and beyond. The pit is still well and truly flooded although you can just about squeeze through from one end to the other on the Berengrave Lane side.

Not all bad though with plenty of butterflies floating along the edge - Speckled Woods, Brimstone, Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Green Veined White and my first Red Admiral of the year on some early flowering nettles. I'm hopeless at flowers but I think I saw flowering Lesser Celandine, Comfrey, Speedwell and a blue flowering nettle which according to my book is a nettle leaved bellflower.

On the bird front plenty of wrens and chiffchaffs singing plus a probable blackcap but what really made me smile was a very young family of Coots at the far end of the flood. Also had a Peregrine Falcon fly past in the Lower Berengrave.

At Motney Hill a small band of Brents still around + good numbers of Black Tailed Godwits in their glorious rust coloured summer plumage.

Richard Lusted, FoB member

Website Manager's Report

(www.friendsofberengrave.btck.co.uk)

In the last six months there have been 156 visits from 142 people. These consisted of 113 from the UK, including four from Medway Council, three each from Australia and Chile, two each from Germany and Mexico and one from each of Argentina, Columbia and Ecuador. (Why the interest from South America?). The origin of three visits could not be identified.

Brian Baker, Website Manager, FoB

History of Berengrave LNR PART 2

Pre-industrial (Before 1901) (Cont.)

Before 1273, records show that the land which includes what is now Berengrave LNR was part of the "Manor of Queencourt", which was part of the Parish of Rainham, in the Royal Estate of Milton Regis

The land was owned by various Kentish Kings, by William the Conqueror and, by 1273, by Queen Eleanor of Provence (Queen Consort of King Henry III). In that year, Queen Eleanor gave part of the "Manor of Queencourt", including the Berengrave LNR area, to the Master and Brethren of St. Katherine's Hospital, near the Tower of London. This was an unusual agreement, in exchange for

various services, and included a condition to re-establish a charity to support six poor bachelors and six poor spinsters and another to build a watermill. The watermill (Queens Court Mill) was probably a tidal mill. This mill is still shown on maps dated 1838, but all evidence has since disappeared

In his book, QUEEN COURT, RAINHAM, AND QUEENDOWN, HARTLIP, written in 1921, H G Faussett-Osborne records:

By her charter dated 5 July, Edward I. [1273], Queen Eleanor [widow of Henry III.] granted and confirmed "to God and the Hospital of St. Katherine at London without the Tower of London," and to the master and brethren there serving God, and to their successors, all her lands, etc., in Renham (Rainham) and Hertlepe (Hartlip) in the county of Kent, and at Roed in the county of Hertford. Hence these lands became known as Queen Court, Queendown and Queenbury respectively.

He goes on to say:

QUEEN COURT. By the courtesy of the Rev. Severne Majendie, Warden of St. Katherine's, I have had access to the leases preserved there. The earliest is dated 4 and 5 Philip and Mary, and is of the "manor called Quene Courte, and the messuage called Berynggrave wythe all the lands, medowes, leeses, marshes and pastures, rents, services, advantages of Courte and all other the appurt sett lyeing and being in the pshe. Of Raynham or ells where wythyn the county of Kent to the same manor and messuage in anywise appert or belonging or except and to the said master reserved all the woods and underwoods of the said manor and messuage and the mill of the same manor, and also all man' of swannes bredyng in and about the same"

In the 18th century the land was made into Manors, divided into farms and let out to tenants.

There follows a long series of leases for lives until the freehold was in 1899 purchased by Mr. J. A. Walter of Berengrave and his sisters ^[1]

The estate comprises some 485 acres (196 hectares) of arable pasture and marshland. Roughly speaking about 60 acres (24 hectares) are bounded on the north by the London Road at its junction with Berengrave Lane, some 170 acres (69 hectares) lie east and west of Berengrave Lane. The site of the old water-mill [which has since disappeared] is beside Rainham Creek at the end of a little lane a few hundred yards east of Bloor's Place, and the remainder of the property in Rainham parish consists of Motne Hills and the marshland between Motne Hills and Otterham

Creek. There are also about 36 acres (15 hectares) in Upchurch and Lower Halstow on the east side of Otterham Creek a few hundred yards west of Ham Green

With the exception of Berengrave and some 30 acres (12 hectares), the whole property was resold by Mr. Walter and his sisters to various purchasers in 1900, and about 56 acres (6 hectares) of fruit and arable land, including the old Queen Court Barn, were again sold in 1920, in small lots

[1] FoB's research indicates that the land was freehold before 1899. Kelly's Directory shows that in 1866 Mr W Walter was the landowner and it was upon his death that the land was bought by his son, Mr. J. A. Walter of Berengrave and his sisters. The East Kent Gazette 21st July 1900 reported the sale by auction of various lots. Lot 12 was the wharf at Rainham Creek made £300. Lot 6 did not make the reserve and as reported in East Kent Gazette on 7th Dec. 1900 was sold by private agreement to Mr. R. Passby for £9750 who purchased it in the name of the Rainham Freehold Land and Allotment Co. Ltd. This lot included the chalk deposits in Berengrave lane which became Berengrave Local Nature Reserve. The Walter family owned Berengrave house until 1921 when it was sold to a Major Day, Royal Engineers for £3350 ending the Walter family connection with Rainham.)

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Brian Baker, Website Manager, FoB

Historian's Report

On behalf of FoB, I have been invited to give a talk on the History of Rainham, including the Motney Hill cement works and Berengrave LNR, to the Berengrave Ladies Group. This will take place at the Methodist Church Hall, Wakeley Road, on Wednesday 18th June.

Fraser Miller, Historian, FoB

Asian Hornet (Vespa velutina nigrithorax)

Not with us yet (I think) but despite "border controls" will be in the next year or two. There has been much hype in the press and on TV often of a sensational and alarmist nature. But, none the less, it is likely to have a profound effect on our environment.

It is a native of China, Korea and India. It is supposed to have been introduced to France by a Chinese ship carrying china (yes, supposed to be true) into Marseilles in 2004. Some queens escaped and, as they say, the rest is history. It is now found in at least 40 departments in France and is resident right up to the Channel coast. As

butterflies, ladybirds etc. regularly cross the Channel it is to be expected that this will happen with the Asian hornet. After all the median wasp and tree bumble came across in this way.

So what does it look like and how does it live? It is a large insect that is bigger than our native wasps but slightly smaller than our native hornet (*Vespa crabro*). The workers (the ones you see flying) are about 1 inch long (2.5 cms.) and the Queens about 3 cms long. They are less orange than our hornet and have a black abdomen (the bottom third of the body) with a distinctive yellow stripe across it.



Approximate
Size

The nests are made of a grey or brownish papery material and usually found at the top of tall trees but can sometimes they are located in garages, under decking etc. It preys on our native pollinating bees plus spiders and flies. All native bees such as bumbles, solitaires and honeybees are very vulnerable. It can destroy a honeybee colony of 55,000 insects in two to three hours. Its colonies consist of about a 1,000 workers.

It has the reputation of being aggressive and there are reports from France of people being stung and dying of anaphylactic shock. However, some scientists say that it is no more aggressive than our native hornet with which it can co-exist.

The colonies die out in the Autumn and the newly mated queens hibernate beneath bark, tree holes left by other boring insects and (you guessed) piles of ceramic pots. I suspect that they will also be found in cold greenhouses, sheds, garages, lofts and in curtains in little used rooms. It is thought (when it arrives) that it will establish itself across southern parts of England and Wales and avoid more northerly climates. This will be exactly the same range as our native hornet.

So, less aggressive than our native hornet but a voracious feeder of pollinators of which we are desperately short. What can we do? Nothing, we are helpless. Just another example of man being careless and unaware that in the modern closely knit world we need to be careful about what we ship and transport. Remember that when you next come back from your foreign holiday – we are all responsible.

Terry Clare, Chairman FoB
Ex-President of the Bee Improvement and Bee-
Breeders' Association (BIBBA)

The Tree Bumble (*Bombus hypnorum*)

In our November 2013 Newsletter a full description was given about this newcomer to our country. It is now possible to give an update about its current situation in the Medway towns and especially Rainham.



I and some of my volunteer and unpaid colleagues have each been receiving hundreds of calls a week amounting to probably more than a thousand – and they are still being received! It has been a crushing workload made worse by Medway Council making redundant its employees who previously dealt with these enquiries. Such are the real effects of budget cuts in essential services to the public whilst increased expenditure is made elsewhere on non-core projects. Don't blame the politicians – we elect them.

The root cause of the problem is the vast increase in the tree bumbles' nests. This effect was forecast and was well known in the pest control industry (including local authorities), bee keepers, Environmental Agency, Bumble Bee Trust etc. Indeed this was explained in our previous Newsletter.

Most of the nests were not noticed until about three weeks ago. So what has changed? Simply the new queens have been produced as have the drones (males). The drones emerge and dance and bob up and down in front of the nest entrance waiting to pounce on and mate with the queens as they leave the nest. Whilst mating the drones and queens fall to the ground and eventually the queen flies off leaving the drone dead or dying. All this activity draws people's attention to the bees and, in ill-informed panic, they phone the Council, who this year has automatically given the contact details of volunteer bee keepers. Nests are normally positioned in the eaves of houses, typically on the corner of the roof.

So what should a house holder do? Absolutely nothing. There is no danger if the nest is left undisturbed (so no climbing ladders!). The nests will shortly die out. This bumble bee has now become an integral part of our diverse environment as, say, the seagulls flying above our heads in inland areas. Let us welcome them as a beneficial addition to our native pollinators. Shortly they will have to contend with the Asian hornet.

Terry Clare, Chairman FoB
Ex-President of the Bee Improvement and Bee-
Breeders' Association (BIBBA)